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Home Upkeep: Wall Coverings

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South Dakota State University, Cooperative Extension, "Home Upkeep: Wall Coverings" (1985). *SDSU Extension Fact Sheets*. 1004.

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FS 834

Home Upkeep: Wall Coverings

Cooperative Extension Service
South Dakota State University
S. S. Department of Agriculture



Home Upkeep:

Wall Coverings

Grace Backman

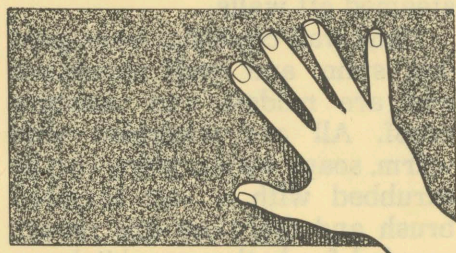
Extension housing specialist

One of the quickest and least expensive ways to make a house your home is to "do something" with its walls. Let them be as individual as you are.

Walls are much more than just empty space to fill with an accessory or two. New materials and new designs are now available to make walls an exciting part of every room.

Whatever treatment you give a wall will be governed by:

- * character of the house
- * condition of the walls
- * money available
- * function and use of the room
- * ease of application and installation
- * cleanliness and maintenance



There are some wall coverings you probably won't select if your home reflects a casual, country style. You probably wouldn't overuse foil coverings in any setting. You would choose durable and washable coverings if you had young children. To find your right options (and there will be more than one), you have to examine your lifestyle.

The biggest mistake you could make in the beginning would be to

commit yourself to one type of covering too early in the game. Explore in the stores and catalogs and keep an open mind as you look.

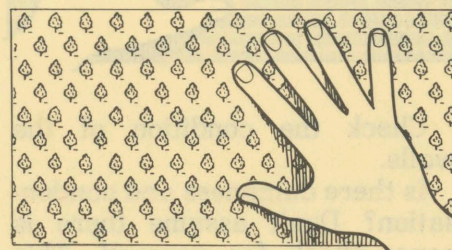
Have you a place for cork, for example? Cork provides a degree of soundproofing but may be difficult to maintain. And there's paneling. These days, paneling looks like wood or like wallpaper.

There are durable coverings in a variety of finishes for hallways and areas that get a lot of use. There are special treatments for kitchens and bathrooms which are high moisture areas. You might simply want a gloss-finish paint in those places for easier maintenance and longer life.

Wall construction and condition may affect the type of finish. Most common types of wall construction are dry wall or gypsum board, plaster, and masonry. With the wide availability of new adhesives and finishing materials, most wall coverings can be applied to any of these wall types (but clean and repair the walls first, if necessary).

You will find the advantages and disadvantages of most wall coverings in this fact sheet. However, always read and follow the manufacturer's instructions accompanying the finish you select.

Because walls occupy the largest area in a room, the selection of color, texture, material, and pattern in wall coverings will have a major effect on the mood and appearance of that room.



The impressions given by warm and cool colors can overcome the cramped appearance of a long, narrow room, for example. Applying a warm or dark covering on the long walls and a light or cool covering on the short walls tends to square up such a room.

Related colors and patterns in adjoining rooms enhance a feeling of space and continuity.

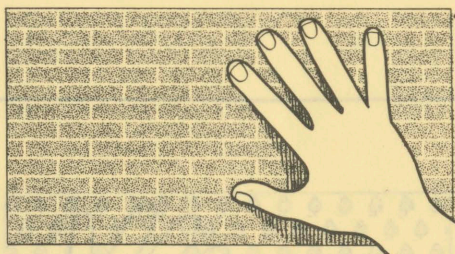
Large designs usually make a room appear smaller. Small designs usually make a room seem larger.

Colors appear darker and brighter on walls than elsewhere because the vertical position provides a ready-made surface for light rays to bounce off, which intensifies the color.

Extremely high ceilings can be made to appear lower by stopping the wall covering a foot or so below the ceiling and treating the rest of the wall the same as the ceiling. A horizontal stripe pattern can give the same effect. A dark color on the ceiling with lighter walls will also lower a ceiling.

Wall coverings with definite plaids or stripes will accentuate walls that are not a perfectly straight match with floors and ceilings. Light colored ceilings

and walls reflect more light than dark colored ones. A glossy surface covering will produce more glare than a matte (or dull appearing) finish.



Check the condition of the walls.

Is there dampness and condensation? Don't assume there is none; check for yourself. This could save possible trouble in the future. If there are stains on walls or ceilings, find the cause and correct it. Waterproofing may be necessary. If there is a condensation problem, consider some form of wall insulation.

Do external noises bother you in this room? To help reduce noise transmitted through walls or ceilings, you can install insulation before you put on the final finish. Some coverings such as carpet, cork, and fabric can also help. As a guide, the denser the material, the less noise transmitted.

Many of the products available for wall coverings are designed for easy application by the do-it-yourselfer. If you are willing to invest in good tools, learn some skills, and do the work yourself, you can save some money.

Check into the ease of application, care requirements, length of service life, possible replacements, and the finished appearance before making your final decision of type and method of installation.

Your Choices

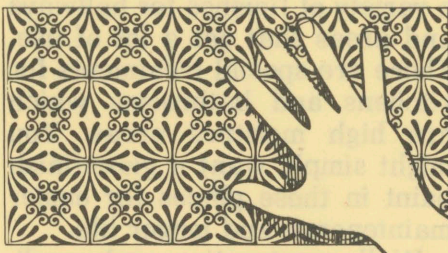
Wall coverings generally fall into three categories: (1) rigid (paneling), (2) non-rigid (one of the

many types is wallpaper), and (3) paint.

Rigid coverings are factory finished with decorative surfaces. They are usually smooth, waterproof, stain resistant, generally very durable, and strong. They come in all price ranges.

Non-rigid or flexible wall coverings also offer a number of options. They are pliable and conform to the shape of the wall. Some are water sensitive and not washable while others can be cleaned with water. Many recent changes in paper, finishes, and printing will extend service life and make maintenance easier.

Paint may be the most popular and versatile of all wall coverings. It can be adapted to a variety of circumstances.



Wallpaper

Wallpaper is among the oldest and most familiar of wall coverings. It is also among the most modern and technologically advanced. It is made of paper with printed or embossed designs and comes in an almost limitless variety of colors, textures, and patterns. Many wallpapers are trimmed and prepasted for easy installation.

The durability of wallpaper varies with its weight and quality. High grade papers are firm, easy to handle when wet, and do not tear or wrinkle readily. Some are treated to resist bacteria and mildew growth.

Plastic coated papers wear better than uncoated papers; however, they are not recom-

mended for use in heavy traffic areas or where severe soiling possibilities may exist. They can be washed with soap and water, but cannot be scrubbed or cleaned with bleach or abrasive cleaners.

Some tips for selecting wallpapers:

- * plain colors resemble paint, but do come in textures
- * textured patterns are more active and more effective in concealing minor wall damage than plain colors
- * bold patterns reduce the illusion of space
- * strippable paper can be carefully removed and repositioned if an oil base primer was used on the wall.

Vinyl

Vinyl wall coverings are synthetic films made of polyvinyl chloride. They are available as rigid panels or non-rigid paper. Most are laminated to a fabric or paper backing. Many non-rigid are strippable; that is, they can be easily removed from walls without steam or water. Non-strippable types may need to be steamed off walls.

Vinyl wall coverings have good soil, stain, and scuff resistance and are mildew and moisture proof. All are washable with warm, soapy water. Many can be scrubbed with a soft textured brush and therefore are recommended for bathrooms, kitchens, children's rooms, or other areas which require frequent cleaning. They are available in a variety of colors, patterns, and textures. Vinyls can hide wall imperfections and give minimal support to walls with cracked and peeling plaster.

Some vinyls have a glossy, "wet look" surface. These usually require special wall preparation, as any defect on the wall is highlighted by the "wet look."

Foil and Mylar

Foil wall coverings are made of thin, flexible sheets of aluminum or simulated metal laminated to a paper or fabric backing. Some are coated with mylar to give a highly reflective mirror finish. The surface may be decorated with hand or machine printing, painting, or screening.

Foils and mylars require extra care when hanging; any scratches, creases, or folds spoil their appearance. They also require that the surface to which they

are applied be perfect so that they will adhere well. Many manufacturers recommend that they be used over a lining paper.

A lining paper, also useful with some other wall coverings, minimizes the possibility of mildew formation, improves adhesion, and allows foils and mylars to be used over uneven or rough or problem walls.

Unlike other coverings, foils neither contract nor expand upon drying, so air bubbles must be removed and smoothed over immediately. Caution: Foils conduct

electricity; avoid touching switches, wires, etc., when applying them. If possible, shut off the electrical circuit in the room during application.

Flocks

Flocks have a design of finely ground particles that have been deposited on an adhesive until a gently raised profile is built up to simulate the look of velvet. They are machine or hand printed. Generally, they are used in formal areas.

Common wall coverings, their advantages, disadvantages, and care.

Material	Advantage	Disadvantage	Care
Wallpapers			
Untreated	Variety of colors, patterns. Can give decided character. Some kinds durable and easy to maintain.	Susceptible to grease stains and abrasions; pattern inks may run if washed.	Vacuum or wipe with dry cloth; do not wash. A few may be washable.
Vinyl coated			
Cloth backed			
Vinyls			
Laminated to other materials	Durable; strippable; waterproof; soil, stain, and scuff resistant.	All non-pasted need vinyl adhesive; there are several kinds, so follow dealer's directions.	Scrubable.
Impregnated cloth on paper backing			
Foils and Mylars	Great for decorative highlights.	Fragile and difficult to handle. Hang over lining paper to minimize wall defects; avoid wrinkles which cannot be smoothed.	Washable.
Fabrics			
Untreated	Variety of textures, colors, fibers; easy coordination with furnishings.	May take more time and skill to hang; use lining paper; stretch fabric taut but not out of shape; use non-staining adhesive; preshrink if there's no backing.	Easy to clean with drycleaning fluid or powders; may be washable. Vacuum.
Laminated to paper			
Self-adhesive			
Ceramic Tile	Can be individualized; easy to maintain; resistant to water, stains, fire.	Hard and cold to touch; reflects noise; can crack or break.	Washable; do not use abrasives.
Mirror Tile	Creates a sense of spaciousness; reflects colors and designs.	Hard and cold to touch; reflects noise; can crack or break.	Washable; do not use abrasives.
Carpet	Sound absorbent. Easy maintenance. Doesn't show nail holes used for hanging wall accessories.	Four walls may look like a padded cell. Cost may be high. Difficult to remove.	Vacuum; some are scrubable.
Leather	Special effect. Can use shapes arranged into a pattern. Durable.	Expensive. Stains are difficult to remove.	Polish with paste floor wax. For stains, brush on rubber cement, peel it off.

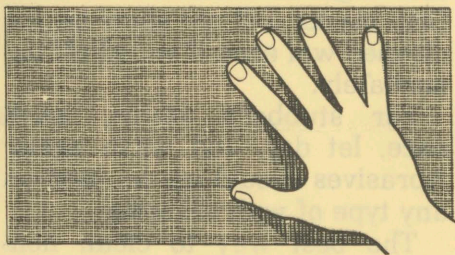
They may have paper, vinyl, or foil backgrounds. They require careful handling during application and cleaning. Some are washable. Most are not as durable as other types of wall coverings you could choose.

Grasscloth and Cork

Grasscloth and cork offer textural interest to walls. They are relatively expensive and require special application techniques. Lining paper is usually recommended.

Grasscloth is an Oriental wall covering made from the honeysuckle vine. The natural material will have variations in color and shading. The synthetic version made of cellulose usually has more uniform coloring and shading.

Cork is available in many forms, colors, and textures. Once applied, it is relatively permanent and difficult to remove. Cork can contribute some degree of insulation and sound control. Clear plastic coatings can make cork more abrasion, stain, and moisture resistant, although some visual texture will be lost.

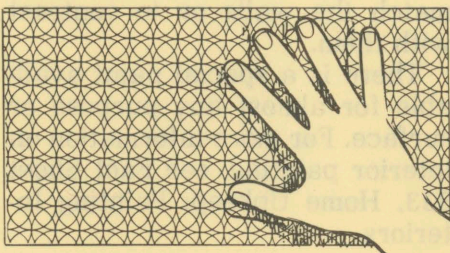


Burlap

A burlap wall covering has a slightly fuzzy surface that offers texture in both plain and printed styles. It is produced from ordinary hemp or jute sack cloth. Most often, it has a paper backing to offer stability and ease of hanging.

Due to its susceptibility to mildew and to take up water,

don't use it in areas prone to dampness, such as kitchens, bathrooms, and basements.



Textile Fabrics

Fabrics provide a depth of texture and richness no other wall covering can provide. They offer a limitless choice of designs, textures, and costs. During recent years they have increased in popularity. They have been used for centuries for warmth and elegance, for example, the great tapestries in old castles. The ladies of the manor spent most of their time embroidering them, but you don't have to go to such extremes.

The best fabrics for covering walls are medium weight and closely woven, such as sailcloth, felt, ticking, and chintz. Bed sheets can even be used. Some fabrics designed specifically as wall coverings have a paper backing for easy application. Those without a backing should be preshrunk. It is almost impossible to obtain perfect design matches with fabrics.

Lightweight fabrics can be shirred onto rods; other methods of attachment include wallpaper paste, starch, staples, and nylon hook and loop tape. Paste gives the most professional look and is the most permanent but does require special care.

Walls may also be upholstered. First, line the walls with wood furring strips. Fill in with a padding of sheet wadding, polyester batting, or flannel to give body, fullness, and stability to the surface, attaching the padding to the furring strips with staples.

Seam the fabric panels together to produce a wall-sized section, matching the pattern. Then baste the section with pins, staples, or glue to the furring strips and stretch to fit. Permanently fasten with tacks, staples, hook and loop tape, or other method. Trim the edges evenly and finish along the ceiling line and baseboard with gimp or self-welting.

Fabrics or carpeting create a softer, cozier environment and some offer limited noise control. They are excellent for concealing cracked or problem walls. Often they are durable and long-lasting.

Paneling

Paneling has come out of the "den" and into nearly every other room of the house. When you look into paneling, you will be delighted—and confused—by the variety of choices you have. It is one of the most versatile and maintenance-free wall coverings you can choose, and it covers a multitude of flaws in your walls. Rigid wood panels are appropriate for any area free of excessive moisture.

Pre-finished panel sheets with matching molding make life easier for the do-it-yourselfer.

Most paneling is plywood. The core may be wood, lumber, particleboard, hardboard, or other rigid material. The surface is even more variable. The difference between real and simulated textures is usually, but not always revealed by price.

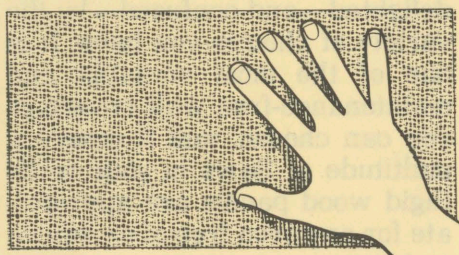
Simulated woodgrain is photographically reproduced, either directly onto the panel or printed on paper or vinyl film laminated to the panel. Sometimes the panels are embossed to not only simulate a wood-like appearance but also to feel like it. Careful selection of a simulated product will offer the look you want for less cost.

Paneling can be applied to fur-

ring strips or directly to wall-board. To help control noise levels, insulation can be added between furring strips before adhering the paneling. Use small finishing nails or a glue adhesive designed for paneling.

If, later, an "accident" occurs and you have some repair to do, you may find that the spot touched up will be clear evidence that you re-worked an area; you will probably end up doing the entire wall. You expect this with other wall coverings — paints age, fabric fade. But sometimes it comes as a shock that even pieces of leftover paneling no longer match what is on the wall and exposed to daily wear.

After the surface has been rubbed clean, dry thoroughly. Two thin coats of wax applied to the surface will add finish and protection.



Paint

Paint is probably the least expensive, quickest, and easiest wall covering available. It gives a uniform surface, but if you don't want uniformity, you can stipple, spatter, or texturize.

The color choices are almost endless. There are a few guidelines:

Because color chips are small, the color will look brighter and darker after it is on the walls. Select one color chip lighter than the final color you want.

When wet, color will also seem darker.

Interior paints vary from high gloss to flat. Generally, the glossier, the more washable it

will be, and the more it will highlight wall imperfections.

Doors have two sides and four edges. They can be painted to match the walls or to contrast with them.

There is a special paint available for almost any purpose or surface. For more information on interior painting, see Fact Sheet 833, Home Upkeep: Painting Interiors.

More About Putting Up Flexible Coverings

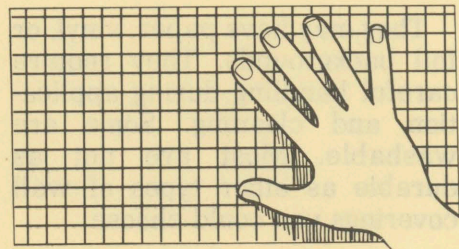
Wallpapers come in unpasted, prepasted, and self adhesive forms. Paste or other adhesives must be applied to every strip of the unpasted variety as it is hung on the wall. Some coverings, such as foils and mylars, give best results if the paste is also applied to the wall.

Adhesive products for wallpapers come in a variety of forms: powder, liquid, premixed, and vinyl. The type used is determined by the kind of covering. For example, paper-backed vinyl coverings can be hung with a premixed paste, while a powdered wheat paste is used with grasscloth and cork coverings. Nonstaining adhesives are better for fabrics and burlaps.

A prepasted wallpaper has been fully pasted at the factory. Water is all that you need, but in some hard-to-tack areas you may also need a little extra adhesive.

Self-adhesives are hung after peeling off a paper backing. This type of covering is more difficult to apply since it is more likely to stretch out of shape.

Check with the dealer or manufacturer on the preparations and products to use with each covering. Most wallpapers come with information on preparing wall surfaces, measuring and cutting, and application. In addition, dealers usually have booklets which contain step-by-step instructions for hanging.



Care

Today's wall coverings are easy to care for and will stay fresh looking and attractive for years with a little attention.

In general, wall coverings should be dusted periodically with a clean, dry mop, a soft cloth wrapped over a broom, or a vacuum cleaner brush. Day-to-day dirt, dust buildup, or dirty finger marks can be removed from washable coverings with lukewarm water and mild detergent.

When there is extra heavy dirt buildup, it is best to start at the bottom, using a sponge to wash up a foot or two in long, sweeping strokes. Rinse with clear water and wipe clean with a rag or terry-cloth towel. Continue up to the ceiling. This avoids the problem of water running down a dirty surface and causing streaks that might be difficult to remove. Drip marks will not show on the cleaned wet area if wiped off immediately.

For stubborn stains, wash once, let dry, and wash again. Abrasives should not be used on any type of wall covering.

The best way to clean non-washable wall coverings, particularly flocks or those made of fabric or grasscloth, is to use the soft-brush attachment of a vacuum cleaner from time to time to remove surface dust and dirt.

If walls are properly prepared according to the recommendations for each type of wall covering, you should have no problems for years to come. But even the best hung wall coverings can come loose, particularly in a

bathroom where steam is a problem.

If this happens, pull the piece away from the wall far enough to be able to get a thin coat of white household glue underneath. Press down firmly for a minute or two, then wipe off excess glue with a damp sponge. For larger areas, it is better to use the manufacturer-recommended adhesive.

If, for any reason, it is necessary to patch a non-rigid

wall covering, the best method is to tear off a piece of matching pattern from the leftover scraps (which you kept for such emergencies, of course!) and fit it over the damaged area. Tearing a piece instead of cutting it produces a feathered edge that will blend into the background much better than a straight-cut edge.

Walls occupy more space than any other surface in your home. Your options in wall coverings

are nearly limitless; be imaginative and try something that really fits the character of you and your home.

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File: 18.5-3-4M-3-85mb-ES 326.

Appreciation to Judith Williamson, housing and home furnishing specialist, Extension Home Economics, University of Maryland, for use of "Selecting wall coverings," FS 316.

